

How to write Hebrew Letters in Iron Age II Israel and Judah: Some Observations on the Art of Letter Writing

K. Martin Heide

Institut für Semitistik, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany,
heidek@uni-marburg.de

Abstract

This article takes a fresh look at the various Hebrew inscriptions of the pre-exilic period, which are to be understood as letters, model letters, or dedicatory inscriptions. In particular, letter introductions and letter endings are examined. Not all elements of the earlier model letter introductions are found in later periods. Military-style letters between superiors and their subordinates are very brisk but nevertheless use various idiomatic and syntactic devices to express their objectives. Letters between colleagues or friends emphasize the blessing of YHWH they wish for their recipients but still differ from dedicatory inscriptions. The unprovenanced Hebrew ostraca published so far employ the same basic greeting formulas known from provenanced materials. Some letters from Arad and Lachish seem to have peculiar endings due to important information being kept for the last sentence.

Keywords: Hebrew ostraca; late pre-exilic letters; greeting formulas; letter endings; dedicatory inscriptions; Arad; Ketef Hinnom; Kuntillet 'Ajrūd; Lachish.



1. Introduction

The last decade saw a renewed interest in the reading and understanding of Iron Age Hebrew letters, which are mainly known from the Lachish and Arad ostraca (henceforth, LO and AO, respectively). To name but a few, the complete publication of the Kuntillet 'Ajrūd inscriptions (Meshel 2012) has finally given scholars the opportunity to read and understand these intriguing school tablets; multispectral images from the Ophel (Jerusalem) ostrakon published and analyzed by Shira Faigenbaum-Golovin et al. (2015) improved the legibility and understanding of this important ostrakon; in a similar way, Shira Faigenbaum-Golovin and her colleagues (2020) reread and reinterpreted AO 24; the ostraca from Lachisch received a reappraisal in an Oxford dissertation (Zammit 2016); applying multispectral imaging to AO 16, Anat Mendel-Geberovich and her colleagues (2017) provided us with a better reading and understanding of this letter; William Schniedewind's *The Finger of the Scribe* (2019) has demonstrated once more that the formal structures of Hebrew letters owe much to older traditions in Mesopotamia and Syria; André Lemaire and Michael Langlois (2021) have recently published a preliminary overview of the Judahite religion in light of the (unprovenanced) Hebrew ostraca from the Jeselsohn Collection; finally, re-evaluating LO 2, Alice Mandell (2022) offered a new interpretation that sees it as a model letter.

My aim in this article is to take a fresh look at the various Iron Age II Hebrew letters, highlighting their similarities and differences in terms of openings and endings. Important observations on this subject have been mainly presented by Pardee et al. (1982), Thomas (2009), Bridge (2010), Zammit (2016), and Schniedewind (2019). Hence, all the basic observations and much beyond have already been made. Moreover, it is good to bear in mind that of the millions of written communications likely exchanged in Iron Age Judah, only very few have come down to us, permitting only cautious observations and conclusions.

Unless stated otherwise, the inscriptions cited below follow Ahituv (2008). The Kuntillet 'Ajrūd inscriptions are cited according to Ahituv, Eshel, and Meshel (2012). Abbreviations for Hebrew inscriptions follow Dobbs-Allsopp et al. (2005).

2. The Earliest Iron Age Hebrew Letter Openings

There is only indirect evidence for the earliest Hebrew letters in the form of introductory formulas. They were probably written in a scribal training workshop in Kuntillet 'Ajrūd (KAjr) and date to ca. 800 BCE (Ahituv 2014: 30; Schniedewind 2014). Practice piece KAjr 3.6 is one. Compared with later letter

However, this type of message opening was rarely used in Judean letters from the pre-exilic period, although the use of the root אָמַר to cite a letter or phrases from it is well attested (Schniedewind 2023: 215). Thus, the main message of LO 3 starts with the words אָזֶן עַבְדְּךָ לְסִפְרָא. אשר, “open the ear of your servant concerning the letter which you sent” (lines 4–6), and continues with the remark “and inasmuch as my lord said” (אָמַר, line 8), referring to a letter that was received “last night” (line 6). Additionally, the same letter features the phrase “as for the letter ... which came ... from the prophet, saying” (לְאָמַר, lines 19–21). The same meaning is most likely found in the restored lines of LO 6, “my lord sent him the [lette]r of the king [and] the letters of the officer[s, sayin]g” (לְאָמַר) (lines 3–5), “will you not write to [them] sa[ying]” (לְאָמַר; lines 9–10), and AO 40 (lines 4–5): הַטָּה [עַבְדְּךָ]: הַטָּה אֶל אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתָּ. “your [ser]vant has inclined his [he]art to what [you] sa[id].”

The only known Hebrew letter opening patterned after the Kuntillet ‘Ajrūd writing exercises but without the blessing is found in the papyrus of Wadi Murraba‘at 1 from the first half of the 7th century BCE (Cross 2003: 116; HAE II/1: 9–11). However, this papyrus is a palimpsest and is, therefore, difficult to read (Pardee et al. 1982: 121; Thomas 2009: 22–23): אָמַר. [] יְהוּ. לְךָ. [ש] לְהַ. “Message of [] yahu to you (?): I surely send (herewith) concerning the welfare of your house. And now ...” (Mur 17:1–2; Milik 1961: 96; Ahituv 2008: 213). The same syntagm, even shorter, appears in a partially legible ostrakon from the antiquities market, *NN 4 (see Section 6).

It is puzzling that the expression אָמַר, message [of], was rarely used in epistolary openings in late pre-exilic Judah and never in the Arad and Lachish letters, although it was employed in 6th-century BCE Edomite, Ammonite, and Phoenician letters. It is also remarkable that we never find the phrase בְּהַ אָמַר, thus says, which is frequent in the Hebrew Bible. Obviously, בְּהַ אָמַר, which is related to *umma*, thus, in the Akkadian letter introductions (Knutson 1975: 199–207; Thomas 2009: 22), represents an older and perhaps more sublime syntagm. There is only one unprovenanced Moabite(?) inscription that initiates a divine message with a variant of אָמַר כֹּה, the dubious *Marzeah Papyrus (see Section 6).

In the Hebrew Bible, the formula בְּהַ אָמַר is said to have been used by the Moabite king Balak: בְּהַ אָמַר בְּלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר, “and they said to him: Thus says Balak the son of Zippor” (Num 22:16; my translation). Similarly, the king of Aram announced: בְּהַ אָמַר בֶּן־הַדָּד, “and said to him: Thus says Ben-Hadad” (1 Kgs 20:3). It is also reported to have been used by one of the judges (Jdg 11:15), the Hebrew kings (1 Kgs 22:27; 2 Kgs 1:11, 9:18–19, 19:3), and the Assyrian king Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:19,29). Only once was this message formula used by somebody who deferentially addressed his elder brother: בְּהַ תְּאָמְרוּן לְאֵדְנִי

לְעֵשָׂו כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב, “Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob” (Gen 32:5). Finally, of course, this formula was often used by the prophets to deliver messages in YHWH’s name (Schniedewind 2019: 106; 2023: 222–223), for example, ... וְאֶל־הָעָם הַזֶּה תֹאמַר כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הַגָּדִי, “and to this people you shall say: Thus says YHWH: Behold ...” (Jer 21:8). It is also known from the Aramaic proclamation of Jer 10:11: כְּדַבֵּר תֹאמְרוּן לָהֶם: “Thus you shall say to them.”

The evidence from the inscriptions on the one hand and the Hebrew Bible on the other leads to two basic suggestions: (1) Towards the late pre-exilic period, introducing a message with כֹּה אָמַר or אָמַר was not a feature of brief or military communications (see Sections 3, 6) and was deemed unsuitable for communications between personally acquainted people (see Sections 4, 5); (2) The predominantly authoritative, royal, but especially prophetic use of the sublime form כֹּה אָמַר may have “sanctified” the expression, affecting even its shorter version, אָמַר, message of, and nearly supplanting its general use. In favor of the latter theory is the frequent use of כֹּה אָמַר in the Hebrew Bible for introducing prophetic messages and its apparent absence from Hebrew inscriptions. The phrase from LO 3:20–21 comes closest: “as for the letter ... which came ... from the prophet, saying” (לאמר).

3. Military-Style Letters of a Superior to his Subordinate

Approximately ten letters from Arad (7th–6th centuries BCE) begin concisely with $\text{'l} + \text{addressee} + \text{w' t}$, constituting the standard opening of letters sent by a superior to a subordinate (AOs 1–3, 5–11, 14, 17; in some letters partly reconstructed): אל אלישב ועת (To Elyashib and now ...; cf. Thomas 2009: 24). After the transitory phrase ועת, and now (Schniedewind 2022), the body of the letter consists of instructions that start with the command, in either infinitive absolute (inf. abs.) or imperative (iprtv.) form. The former may also be seen as an introductory imperative (cf. Watts 1962; Hatav 2021: 135–137). Most of the letters start with the infinitive absolute נתן, give, while AOs 5, 6, and 9 employ שלח or שלח, send. The text often prolongs the first command form with infinitives, (or, more likely,) imperatives, perfect consecutives ($w\text{-}qatal$), or jussives ($yiqtol$), as in the following letters:³

- AO 1 (inf. Abs., $w\text{-}iprtv.$, $w\text{-}x\text{-}yiqtol$, $x\text{-}yiqtol$): ועת נתן לכתיים יין ... וכתב שם הים ... ומעוד ... תרכב ... מיין ... תתן

3 To emphasize the phrases in question, the letters from Arad discussed in Section 3 are quoted with ellipses (...) and without word dividers (for the analysis of the verbal forms, see also HAE I: 355–373, 381).

the name of the day, and from the surplus ... you shall load. From the wine ... you shall give” (lines 2–6).

- AO 2 (inf. abs., *wə-qatal*, negated *yiqtol*, *wə-qatal*): ועת נתן לכתים ... יין ... והסבת מהר “And now, give to the Kittiyim ... wine ..., and transfer (it) tomorrow, don’t delay. And if there is vinegar left, give it to them” (lines 1–8).
- AO 3 (iprtv., *wə-iprtv.*, iprtv., *wə-qatal*; see Na’aman 2011: 84): ... ועת תן מן היין ... וצרר אתם בצק [א]ו [ל]ח[נ]ם ספר החטם והלחם ולקחת אלך ... “And now, give from the wine ... And you shall pack with them dough [o]r [br]ea[d]. Count the wheat and the bread and take for yourself ...” (lines 1–9).
- AO 4: see below.
- AO 5 (inf. abs./iprtv., *yiqtol*) is difficult to decipher, but multispectral imaging has revealed a few more elements (Na’aman 2011: 85; 2021: 225): ועת שלה מאתך ... [תרכ]ב קמנה לעשת] להם ... “And now, send from you ... [loa]d flou[r to make bread ...” (lines 1–6).
- In AO 6, only the first imperative or inf. abs. שלה is visible (line 2).
- AO 7 (inf. abs., *wə-qatal*, *wə-x-iprtv.*, [*wə-qatal* restored according to Arad Ostracon 4:17]): ועת נתן לכתים ... [ו]כתבתה לפניך ... ושמן חתם ושלחנ]: “And now, give to the Kittiyim ..., [and] you shall write (it?) before you ..., and as for oil, se[al and send it to us]” (lines 1–9).
- In AO 8, only the inf. abs. נתן is visible (line 1).
- In AO 9, no verbal form is visible; the first verbal form is reconstructed as שלה.
- In AO 10, the body of the letter employs imperatives only: ([inf. abs.], iprtv., iprtv.): ועת [נתן לכתים יין ... חתם לבן עבדיהו ושלח ביד הכתים]: “And now, [give to the Kittiyim wine ... [Se]al (it), to Ben-Obadyahu se[nd it via the] Kittiyim” (lines 1–5).
- In AO 11, only the inf. abs. נתן is visible (line 2), and, possibly, the imperatives. ח[ק]ל לא, fill (and) take, in line 4 (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005: 27).
- AO 12: see below.
- In AO 14, only the imperative or inf. abs. שלה is visible (line 3). Lines 1–2 are probably identical to AO 1:1–2 (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005:30).
- AO 17, which is sent to נחם, Naḥum, is dominated by imperatives (inf. abs./iprtv., *wə-qatal*, *wə-iprtv.*, *wə-iprtv.*), while the commands’ urgency is emphasized by the adverb מהרה, quickly: ושלח לזף מהרה וחתם ... ולקחת משם שמן 1 ושלח בא ... “And now, go to ..., and you shall take from there one jar of oil, and send to Ziph (?) quickly, and you shall seal it with your seal” (lines 1–6).

It is noteworthy that two very concise letters skip the formal transition *ועתה*, and now, demanding immediate action with the imperatives *תן*, give (AO 4:1), and *קח*, take (AO 12:1). Moreover, the body of both letters continues with imperatives, while AO 4 even lacks word dividers (Aharoni 1981: 19; cf. Schwiderski 1997: 143). In AO 12, as in AO 17, the necessity for immediate action is further underlined by the adverb *מהרה*, quickly. The use and context of the imperatives in both letters support the view that their primary function is to demand immediate action (Joüon 2008: 349):

- AO 4: *תן לכתים שמן 1 חתם ושלחנו ויין ב 2 תן להם*, “Give to the Kittiyim 1 (jar of) oil; seal (it) and send it and 2 baths of wine give to them.”
- AO 12: *קח[ח] שמן 1... ותן א[תם] [לקו]סענל מהרה ... ותן [א]ת הלחם ...* “Take one (jar) of oil ... and give it [to Qau]sanal quickly ... and give the bread ...” (lines 1–6; not cited in Ahituv 2008; see Aharoni 1981: 26; Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005: 28–29).

These letter structures demonstrate that even the scribes of concise military-style letters had recourse to various syntactic devices to express their relatively stereotyped commands (infinitive absolute, imperative, *wə-qatal*, *yiqtol*).

4. Letter Openings of a Subordinate to his Superior

4.1. Letters with a complete address

Subordinates’ communications to their superiors were done with courtesy and politeness. When *’Elyashib* is addressed by one of his subordinates, the “short introduction” (see Section 3) expands to *’l’ dny + addressee + YHWH yš’ llšlmk w’t*. Thus, AO 18 reads *אל אדני. אלישב. יהוה ישאל לשלמך ועתה*, “To my lord *’Elyashib*. May YHWH concern himself with your well-being. And now ...” (lines 1–3). Although the letter is addressed to a superior, an observation supported by lines 6–8 (*צותני. אשר. ולדבר*, “and the matter which you commanded me”), the body of the letter begins with an imperative continued by *wə-x-yiqtol* (... לשמריהו *תן. ולקרסי תתן* ... “give to Shemaryahu ... and to the Qerosite give ...,” lines 4–6). It may be argued that *תן* and *נתן* in the Arad letters denote merely “release to bearer” (Pardee et al. 1982: 56). In other words, the imperative in Classical Hebrew is not associated with an unobjectionable command, as in modern military language, as it underscores the urgency of immediate action.⁴

4 Thus, in the Hebrew Bible, even the deity is often invoked in the imperative to call for immediate action (e.g., Ps 3:7; 7:6; 10:12; see also Bridge 2010: 523–524).

Grammatically speaking, the opening of AO 18 was also used in several letters from Lachish. After the sender-addressee opening, the subject of the first wish-you-well sentence is always the deity, and its predicate is a jussive: ישמע יהוה, “let YHWH hear him,” or ירא יהוה, “let YHWH see him.”

However, in some Lachish letters (6th century BCE), the sender either used an older transition formula (עת כים עת כים), of which ועת is simply a later shortcut (Torczyner et al. 1938: 109–111), or he elegantly modified the transition formula ועת to incorporate it in the blessing. Moreover, to appear as humble and thankful as possible (Bridge 2011), the scribe introduced a self-abasement, which then served as the “new” transition formula to the body of the letter, as in LO 6: אל אדני יאוש. ירא. יהוה את אדני את העת הזה. שלם מי עבדך כלב כי. שלח. ... אדני את ספר המלך ... “To my lord Ya’ush. May YHWH cause my lord to see at this very time peace. Who is your servant (but) a dog that my lord sent him the king’s [lette]r...” (lines 1–4). Basically, the same construction underlies LO 2, which, having only a very short body, is cited in full (Zammit 2017): אל אדני יאוש. ישמע. יהוה את אדני. שמעת שלם. עת. כים. עת. כים מי. עבדך כלב כי. זכר. אדני. את. [ע]בדה. ידעתה לא. ידעתה לא. ידעתה לא. “To my lord Ya’ush. May YHWH cause my lord to hear tidings of well-being now, today, this very day. Who is your servant (but) a dog that my lord remembered his [se]rvant? May YHWH promptly bring my l[ord] first knowledge of a matter of which you/I do not know” (lines 1–6).

Alice Mandell (2022) recently identified the enigmatic letter LO 2 as a model text to teach letter writing. Her conclusion rests on the assumption that the scribe committed an error and wrote יבכר (see the discussion in Zammit 2017) instead of יברך (line 5). Assuming that this metathesis is valid, it is tempting to view the reading תרכב, to load, in AO 1:7 (see Section 3) as a similar mistake (Mandell 2022: 105), confused with תרבך, to mix. However, there is no need for emendation, as תרכב makes perfect sense. The recipient of AO 1 was “told to load a sufficient quantity of flour to make bread for the troops” (Ahituv 2008: 95; cf. HAE I: 355–356; Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005: 8). Another, more promising case of confusing *bkr* with *brk* comes from the Hebrew Bible (Mandell 2022: 104):

וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן בְּכוֹרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי הוּא הַבְּכוֹר וְבַחֲלָלוֹ יִצְעֵי אָבִיו נִתְּנָה בְּכֹרְתּוֹ לְבְנֵי יוֹסֵף
 בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא לְהַתִּיחֵשׁ לְבְכֹרָה: כִּי יְהוּדָה גְּבֵר בְּאֶחָיו וּלְנָגִיד מִמֶּנּוּ וְהַבְּכֹרָה לְיוֹסֵף

The sons of Ruben, the firstborn of Israel: He was actually the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s bed his *birthright* was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright; though Judah became prominent among his brothers and a ruler came from him, yet the *birthright* belonged to Joseph (1 Chr 5:1–2; my translation).

To serve as an example for LO 2, however, the confusion goes the wrong way. Instead of reading and translating בכרה, birthright, thrice, the Septuagint reads ברכה, blessing, twice (italicized) and בכרה, birthright, once. Moreover, this alternative reading (probably of the LXX-Vorlage) does not change the basic meaning of 1 Chr 5:1–2. It is even possible that the reading of the LXX(-Vorlage) was the original and the Masoretic text secondary. In this case, the change from בכרה to ברכה would be due to assimilation since the root *bkr* is used twice before (בכור 1 Chr 5:1a) and once after the two readings in question (1 Chr 5:3). Alternatively, the change may have been made for theological reasons (Rudolph 1955: 43). Be that as it may, the scribe of LO 2 was not involved in any literary copying process, unlike the biblical scribe. LO 2 offers no contextual reasons why an experienced scribe should change or confuse the letter sequence of the common root *brk*, suggesting that *ybrk* might simply be a scribal slip. However, contrary to the variants in 1 Chr 5 or scribal slips, such as ברכה for <כ>ברכה in AO 16:3 (see Section 5), the confusion would not only have led to a completely different meaning but also to a different letter structure, rendering the expanded greeting after the self-abasement formula unrecognizable. Moreover, the ostrakon derives from the same storage jar as LO 6, and judging from the script, its scribe was not a novice and probably wrote LO 6 as well (Lehmann 2003; Mandell 2022: 92). It is conceivable that the scribe would have immediately recognized his mistake if he glanced at the ostrakon because the sequence *kr* of *ybrk* is clearly visible in the middle of the penultimate line (Torczyner et al. 1938: 34).

Mandell goes on to argue that the originally intended blessing formula is extraordinary, using the jussive יברך instead of the performative perfect ברכתך (see Sections 5–7), and affirms that this “rare” example would be “appropriate for a situation where a lower-status person writes to a professional superior” (Mandell 2022: 103). However, the only other letter opening that uses *ybrk*, the jussive of the root *brk*, is the practice piece KAjr 3.6 from ca. 800 BCE (see Section 2). But unlike LO 2, *ybrk* in KAjr 3.6 is introduced after the formula *brtk l + DN(s)*, and its form hides the object (you) by assimilating the suffix (Ahituv, Eshel, and Meshel 2012: 96). Later letter openings solely use the formula *brtk l + DN*, except for the highly dubious ostrakon *Moussaieff 2 (Bordreuil, Israel, and Pardee 1998: 7; see Section 6). It *seems* that in LO 2, part of the greeting was added *after* the debasement formula “Who is your servant (but) a dog.” However, in the few similar inscriptions we have, the submissive self-designation always serves as a transition to the main body of the letter (Schwiderski 1997: 135–136; Pardee 2002: 79, n. 5; Bridge 2010: 525) or as the beginning of the actual message. This is the case in LO 6: ... שלח אדני אנת ספ[ר] המלך ... “who is your servant (but) a dog that my lord sent him the king’s [lette]r ...” (lines 2–4). LO 5 (see Section 4.2) is poorly preserved but clearly

features the same function as the debasement formula: אל [ש]לחת כלב. כי [ש]לחת אל [הספרם] [א.ת.]. עבדך. “Who is your servant (but) a dog, that you [s]ent to your servant the [letters]?” (lines 3–5). LO 12 bears only faint traces of writing, but, even here, the salutation does not continue after the possible self-humiliation (lines 1–2; see Pardee et al. 1982: 108; Bridge 2010: 526). A similar submissive self-designation is known from the Amarna letters (EA 201:15, 202:13, 247:15, 378:18–25),⁵ where it is always used at the beginning of or in the main part of the letter. Nevertheless, LO 2 may be seen as an exception as that part of the introductory blessing comes *after* the debasement formula (Zammit 2016: 199–200; Mandell 2022: 105 n. 64). However, it is noteworthy that in LOs 5, 6, and probably 12, the phrase מי עבדך כלב כי is used after the sender received information through letters (Bridge 2010: 527). The receipt of information or goods seems to have been in the background of LO 2 as well. The sender thankfully acknowledges what he received: “My lord *remembered* his servant,” זכר. אדני. את. [ע]בדה. Only LO 2 uses the root *zkr* (Zammit 2017: 54), whereas LOs 5 and 6 (and probably 12) use *šlh* to acknowledge the receipt of letters. In view of the parallels presented above, it is likely that the phrase יהוה את א[דנ]י דבר. יבכר. “May YHWH promptly bring my I[ord] first knowledge of a word/information,” underpins the sender’s gratitude for the specific attention he had received. Now, his lord should likewise be favored by YHWH (DCH II: 173)⁶ in order to receive important information quickly (cf. Torczyner et al. 1938: 41; Aḥituv 2008: 62; Zammit 2017: 55). Considering the imminent military threat pervading the background of the Lachish letters, it is plausible that the sender purposefully withheld certain details. While striving to convey important news to his superior, he did not betray any details. This may account for the rather succinct nature of LO 2. Last but not least, if LO 2 was a model letter, why is its extended blessing, supposedly introduced with יברך after the self-abasement, not reflected in any other letter? To conclude, LO 2 remains a puzzling letter. Seeing it as an exercise piece is an attractive theory, but one that, I think, raises more questions than answers.

5 The formulaic statement “Who is the dog that would not obey the order of the king?” is also used in the body of several letters to affirm loyalty (Bridge 2010: 527; Zammit 2016: 205–210).

6 Verbal instantiations of *bkr* are rare in Biblical Hebrew, only conveying meanings such as “treat as a firstborn” or “treat preferentially” (Mandell 2022: 94). Evidence for the use of the root *bkr* in the basic sense of “do sth. early / for the first time” does not only come from Syriac (Sokoloff 2009: 152) and Classical Arabic (Lane 1863: 239–240) but also from the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions (http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0030289.html; Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019: 60). Moreover, the reflexive stem of the root was used in Ancient South Arabian in the sense of “to participate (in a battle) for the first time” (<http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultList?idSearchRoot=bkr>). In this context, it is noteworthy (or is it a mere coincidence?) that two nouns richly attested in ANA inscriptions and based on the root *bkr* became loanwords in Hebrew during the later Judean monarchy, namely בָּכָר, young camel (Is 60:6), and בְּכֵרָה, young (she)-camel (Jer 2:23; Knauf and Niemann 2021: 269; Heide and Peters 2021: 284, 288). There was obviously some language contact between Judah and ancient North Arabia in this period.

LO 3 lacks any self-abasement but, nevertheless, points to the formality of the sender-addressee relationship by beginning with עבדך, your servant (Bridge 2010: 524), and the name of the sender: שלח. להגיד לאדני יאוש. עבדך. הושעיהו. “Your servant, Hosha’yahu, sends (herewith) to inform my lord Ya’ush: May YHWH cause my lord to hear tidings of peace and tidings of good. And now, ...” (lines 1–4; cf. Thomas 2009: 23). The syntagm להגיד לאדני שלח is also known from Gen 32:6 וְאֶשְׁלַחָהּ לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי, “So I sent to inform my lord.” There is also an unprovenanced ostrakon, *JH 432, that uses the same syntagm in a different context (see Section 6). Finally, the formula שלח שמעת שלום ושמעת טב combines the wish-for-good-news from LO 2 (see above) and LO 4 (see Section 4.2.; Ahituv 2008: 65).

4.2. Letters without addressee-sender openings

Letters by subordinates to their superiors that lack any addressee-sender opening (Pardee et al. 1982: 94) begin immediately with the wish for good news: *yšm’ YHWH ’t ’dny šm’t t b/šlm*. The names of the sender and the recipient are not explicitly mentioned, but the letters probably belong to the correspondence of Ya’ush (Ahituv 2008: 69–70).

LO 9 uses the shortest wish: ישמע יהוה. את אדני שלום וטב ועת, “May YHWH cause my lord to hear n[ew]s of peace and [good news, and no]w...” (lines 1–3). LO 9 also has a very short body, consisting mainly of imperatives, comparable to the Arad letters (see Section 3).

LO 4 seems to play on the transition formula but retains it: ישמע יהוה את אדני, “May YHW[H cause my lor]d to hear good news this very day. And now ...” (lines 1–2). LO 5 lacks ועת but has extended constructions of עת and a self-abasement formula instead (see Section 4.1): ישמע יהוה [את אדני שמעת], “May YHWH cause my [lord] to hear news of [pea]ce and good tidings [now, today, this very da]y. Who is your servant (but) a dog that ...” (lines 1–4). The same applies to LO 8, which lacks the self-abasement formula. Unfortunately, the inscription is largely faded: ישמע יהוה [את אדני], “May Y[HW]H cause [my] lord to hear news of peace and good tidings now, today, this very day” (lines 1–2; not in Ahituv 2008; compare Dobbs-Allsopp et al. [2005: 325] with Zammit [2016: 23]). It appears that the variations in these greetings reflect adaptations to the sender-recipient relationship and the subject at hand (for more details, see Bridge 2010; Zammit 2016: 199–204).

The well-known Mešad Ḥashavyahu ostrakon (7th century BCE), a judicial plea, seems to share some features with these non-addressed openings. However,

except for *ישמע אדני*, may my lord hear (line 1), it substantially deviates from the letters above, lacking addressee, greeting, and any transition formula (Pardee et al. 1982: 23; 2002: 77; Bridge 2010: n. 17).

5. Letter Openings between Colleagues or Relatives

Another type of letter opening suggests collegial or familial relationships (Thomas 2009: 23–25). It often combines a wish for well-being, expressed in the form of *šlh lšlm* + addressee + *wšlm bytk*, and the blessing known from the exercise letter KAjr 3.6, except that the deity is not “maximized” (ליהוה ברכתך. ליהוה), but strictly limited to YHWH (Schniedewind and Smoak 2019: 6). According to the newly established reading of AO 16 (Mendel-Geberovich et al. 2017), this letter opens with, *אהבך חנניהו. שלח לשלם אלישב. ולשלם ביתך ברכתך*. ליהוה. ועת, “Your friend, Hananyahu, sends (herewith) concerning the welfare of Elyashib, and to the welfare of your house. I (hereby) bless (you) to YHWH. And now, ...” (lines 1–3). The same opening was used in another ostrakon from Arad: *בנך. אהבך חנניהו. יהוכל. שלח. לשלם. גדליהו [בן] אליאר. ולשלם. ביתך. ברכתך לניהוה. ועת*. “Your son, Yehucal, sends (herewith) concerning the welfare of Gadalyahu [son of] Elyah’ir and concerning the welfare of your house. I (hereby) bless you to [YHW]H. And now, ...” (AO 21:1–3). The same applies to AO 40, except that *ביתך* is missing: *בנכם. גמרניהו [ונחמיהו]. שלח [לשלם] מלכיהו ברכתך [ליהוה] ועת*: “Your sons Gemar[yahu] and Nehemyahu send (herewith) [concerning the welfare] of Malchiyahu. I (hereby) bless you [to YHW]H. And now, ...” (lines 1–4).

6. Letter Openings in Non-Provenanced Ostraca

In the last two decades, several non-provenanced ostraca palaeographically dated to the late pre-exilic period were published. Some have letter openings similar to AOs 21 and 40 (see Section 5). Ostrakon no. 1 from the Kaufman Collection uses practically the same opening formula as AO 21 (Lemaire 2012: 35; 2015: 97): *בנך. שלחמיהו שלח לשלם. יחמליהו. ולשלם. ביתך. ברכתך ליהוה ועת*, “Your son, Shelemyahu, sends (herewith) concerning the welfare of Yahmalyahu and concerning the welfare of your house. I (hereby) bless you to YHWH. And now, ...” (*Kaufman 1:1–5).

Another ostrakon from an unnamed private collection in Jerusalem, which allegedly hails from the Shephelah (Lemaire and Yardeni 2006: 204) and is difficult to read, belongs to the same category but omits *ביתך*, the welfare of your house, and the blessing: *בנך. גדליהו. שלח לניהוה שלם. ועת*. “Your son Gedalyahu sends (herewith) concerning the we[lfa]re of Shallum. And now ...” (*NN 3:1–2).

Ostrakon *JH 432 from the Jeselsohn Collection, the so-called Nōqādīm Ostrakon (Ahituv 2008: 194; Eshel and Eshel 2008), uses a more formal syntagm known from LO 3 (שלח להגד, sent to inform; see Section 4.1). Although it suggests a close relationship between sender and recipient (בנך, your son), it omits both the “welfare of your house” and the blessing: ... נתניהו שלח להגד. לשלמיהו. ועת. “Your son Netanyahu sends (herewith) to inform Shelemyahu. And now ...” (lines 1–3).

Another ostrakon from the Jeselsohn Collection betrays a professional relationship between the sender and the recipient (עבדך, your servant, sends to אדני, my lord; see Section 4.1, LO 3) but uses the same devices as AO 21 (Ahituv 2008: 199–202; Lemaire and Langlois 2021: 86*): “Your servant Yada‘yahu sends (herewith) concerning the welfare of my lord Nadabyahu and concerning the welfare of your house. I (hereby) bless you to YHWH. And now ...” (*JH 433:1–4).

Two letters from the Jeselsohn Collection, *JH 28 and *JH 29, have a similar wish for well-being as AO 18 (Lemaire and Langlois 2021: 86*): יהוה ישאל לאדני, “May YHWH concern himself with the welfare of my lord” (see Section 4.1). Mentioning the deity before the verb renders this opening unusual.

Some letters have a brief opening comparable to the military-style letters from Arad (see Section 3), such as אַל. פּלטיהוּ. וְעַתָּה. “To Pelatyahu. And now ...” (*NN 1:1); אַל דּוּ [...] אַנְד [...] וְעַתָּה, “To D [... And] now ...” (*NN 2:1; Lemaire and Yardeni 2006: 197–201); and [...] לְ[א]ל [...] וְעַתָּה [...], “[T]o L [...] And now ...” (*JH 208:1; Lemaire and Langlois 2021: 90*).

Last but not least, a partially legible ostrakon from the antiquities market (Lemaire and Yardeni 2006: 205) uses the rare opening formula “message of PN” (see Section 2) but continues in a unique way: ... אַמְרֵי. מִכִּיָּהוּ לְמַתַּנְיָהוּ. הִנֵּה אֲדַבֵּר ... “Message of Mikayahu to Matanyahu, ‘Behold, I shall speak ...’” (*NN 4:1–3).

On the one hand, these pieces indicate that authors enjoyed more freedom to combine various greetings and adapt to specific sender-addressee relationships and situations than the few letters from Arad and Lachish would suggest. On the other hand, the non-provenanced ostraca do not attest to yet unknown elements in the greeting formulas. The few letters from Arad and Lachish seem to provide a basic but sufficient insight into late pre-exilic letter formulas. It would be unwise to draw further conclusions from inscriptions from the antiquities market, and we must hope for further *in situ* finds to confirm our preliminary observations. Two additional inscriptions should be noted. The *Marzeah Papyrus seems to use a variant of the prophetic message opening, לגרא אלהין. אמרו. כה, “thus the gods say to Gera” (see Section 2), but should be regarded as dubious at best (Cross 1996; Ahituv 2008: 427; cf. Ahituv 2023: 321–325). The ostrakon *Moussaieff 2, which is highly questionable in terms of paleography and content (Berlejung and Schüle

1998; Eph'al and Naveh 1998; Lemaire 1999; Rollston 2003), is to date the only ostrakon, besides KAjr 3.6, to use the jussive of the root *brk* in the letter opening, albeit in the form *ybrkk* (see Ruth 2:4; Ahituv 2014: 31): *ועתה יהוה בשלום. ועתה*, “May YHWH bless you in peace. And now ...” (*Moussaieff 2:1; see Section 4.1).

7. Letter Openings, Dedicatory Formulas, and Greetings

In the letter openings reviewed in Section 5, the subject of the blessing *ליהוה ברכתך* and others like it is always the sender. It differs from dedicatory formulas (Mandell 2012: 143) that bless the owner of inscribed objects, such as the stone basin inscription KAjr 1.2 (9th–8th centuries BCE; Ahituv, Eshel, and Meshel 2012: 76): *לעבדיו בן עדנה ברך הא ליהו*: “For ‘Obadyaw son of ‘Adna: Blessed be he to YHW.” This formula was also used in the tomb inscription Khirbet el-Qom 1 (Naveh 1979; Ahituv 2008: 221; 8th century BCE): *ברך. אריהו. ליהוה*. “Blessed be ‘Uriyahu to YHWH.” Other stone blocks with dedications using the term *ברך* were probably carved out of the same burial cave (Naveh 2001; Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005: 575–578). Compared with the Hebrew Bible, the dedicatory formula is identical to blessings that occur in personal greetings, such as Gen 14:19 (*ברוך*) and Ruth 2:20 (*ברוך הוא ליהוה*). Often, the person greeted and blessed is addressed in the 2nd person, as in 1 Sam 15:13, 23:21, 2 Sam 2:5, Ruth 3:10, and Ps 115:15 (Mandell 2012: 143). Sometimes, blessings in the 2nd and the 3rd person are combined. Ketef Hinnom 2 (7th century BCE; Ahituv 2012) blesses the owner of the amulet in the 3rd person (Barkay et al. 2004: 68)—...*ל. ל. ...* [For ...]yahu: Blessed be h[e]/sh[e] to YHW[H] who helps...” (lines 1–3)—but employs the 2nd person in an additional blessing at the end: *יברך יהוה ישמרך יאר יהוה פניו [אל]יך וישם לך*: “May YHWH bless you, keep you. May YH[W]H make his face shine [upon] you and grant you p[ea]ce” (lines 5–12). This blessing is also quoted (at least in part) in Ketef Hinnom 1 (Barkay et al. 2004: 61): *יברך יהוה [וי]שמרך [יא]ר*: “May YHWH bless you and [may he] keep you. May YHWH make [his fa]ce shine ...” (lines 1:14–18). Although Ketef Hinnom 1 seems to address people collectively, the final blessings of lines 14–18 were most likely specifically addressed to the owner (Barkay et al. 2004: 61). Moreover, in KAjr 3.6, this phrase is also part of the letter-opening exercise, blessing the addressee as an individual (Sections 2, 4.1). It is noteworthy that unlike the passive forms known from dedicatory inscriptions (*... ליהוה ברך*) and personal greetings, the active blessing formula *ליהוה ברכתך* presently only appears as an epistolary formula (Pardee et al. 1982: 49).

8. Peculiar Letter Endings: “One more thing”

Some of the better-preserved military-style letters from the late pre-exilic period have a distinct feature: Instead of a formal conclusion, they close with a message that seems unimportant in terms of its position but very interesting in terms of its content. These letters save an important message for last. In doing so, the closing message sometimes appears as a natural sequence of different topics or questions that the sender addresses (cf. Schniedewind 2023: 214), as in LO 3: וספר. טביהו. LO 3: וספר. טביהו. עבד. המלך. הבא אל. שלם. בן ידע. מאת. הנבא. לאמר. השמר. שלחה. עבדך. אל. .אל. “And, as for the letter of Tobiyahu, the servant of the king, which came to Shallum, the son of Yaddua, from the prophet, saying, ‘Be on guard!’ your servant is sending it to my lord” (lines 19–21). The same applies to LO 4: וידע. “And let him know that for the fire-signal of Lachish we are keeping watch according to all the signs which my lord has given, because we cannot see Azekah” (lines 10–13). LO 5:9–10 probably belongs to this category, too: יבא טביהו. האל. עבדך. “Will Tobiyahu of the royal family come to your servant?” (Ahituv 2008: 77) or: “Is it to your servant that Tobiyahu will bring royal grain?” (Na’aman 2012: 224–225).

In other cases, the final message features a change of topic relative to the main body of the text: ישב. “Concerning the matter which you commanded me, it is accomplished: he is staying in the house of YHWH” (AO 18:9–10). See also AO 24: הנה שלחתי. “And the word of the king directed to you, on your very lives. Look, I have written to warn you: The men to Elisha, lest Edom should enter there” (lines 17–20). The same probably applies to AO 40: ידע. מלך. יהודה כי איננו. יכלם. לשלח. את הן [את הרעה. אשר] אדם. “May the king of Juda[h] be apprised [that w]e are not able to send the [...] the evil whi[ch] Edo[m] ...” (lines 13–15). Some letters seem to have traces of such important news (AO 3:12: ואדמם, “and the Edomites”; AO 21:5: אדם, “Edom”), but the missing context does not allow further conclusions.

Dwelling on this feature, one letter from the Hebrew Bible comes to mind: King David’s written order to murder Uriyah the Hittite. If letter writing in this early period of the United Monarchy is comparable to the later Iron Age, the king’s letter to his officer, Joab, probably began with ordinary, everyday matters, such as military data and instructions, retaining the most important message for the very end or even the reverse side of the letter, as in AO 18.

וַיִּכְתֹּב דָּוִד סֵפֶר אֶל־יֹאָב וַיִּשְׁלַח בְּיַד אֹרִיָּה: וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּסֵפֶר לְאֹמֶר הֲבֹ אֶת־
 אֹרִיָּה אֶל־מֹל פְּנֵי הַמִּלְחָמָה הַחֲזָקָה וְשִׁבְתֶּם מֵאַחֲרָיו וְנָכַה וּמָת:

And David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die (2 Sam 11:14–15; my translation)

9. Conclusion

To compose their letters, the scribes from Arad, Lachish, and other places employed several syntagms:

- (1) It seems that whereas in the Hebrew Bible, high officials and prophets frequently used the phrase כֹּה אָמַר, the late pre-exilic Judean scribes did not, and they even avoided the shortened form אָמַר, message of. Instead, various text modules were used according to the social positions of the sender and the recipient.
- (2) In messages from a superior to his subordinate, imperatives or equivalent verbal forms were often used in the body of the letters.
- (3) Imperatives were also used in letters from subordinates to their superiors, which suggests that their primary purpose was to call for immediate action. Moreover, in some letters, the sender took great care to maximize his “best wishes” and emphasize his loyalty, transitioning from the introduction to the body of the letter with a self-abasement formula.
- (4) Letters between friends, relatives, or colleagues usually contained a blessing in the form of “I (hereby) bless you to YHWH,” which differed from dedications (Section 7; blessed is so-and-so to YHWH).
- (5) Letter openings from non-provenanced ostraca do not indicate hitherto unknown expressions. However, they do demonstrate how introductory phrases were tailored to specific situations, manifesting the freedom to prefer or combine different forms of greeting.⁷
- (6) The scribes from Arad and Lachish structured some letters so that significant subjects appear at the end.

⁷ If the ostraca (or at least some of them) are forgeries, the forgers were careful enough to imitate genuine letters while using some flexibility. If the ostraca (or at least some of them) are genuine, they contribute nothing of significance to the observations made so far.

Acknowledgments

This article is a revised and expanded version of the paper I gave at the *Epigraphy in Judah* conference at the Roger and Susan Hertog Center for the Archaeological Study of Jerusalem and Judah, May 21–24, 2023, Jerusalem. I want to thank Mitka Golub and Yossi Garfinkel for inviting me to the conference. I have enormously benefited from the exchange of ideas and the sound and instructive comments and discussions. I want to thank two reviewers for their very helpful comments, corrections, and suggestions, as well as Johannes Dams (M.A.) for proofreading my article. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own.

References

- Aharoni, Y. 1981. *Arad Inscriptions*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Ahituv, S. 2008. *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period*. Jerusalem: Carta.
- Ahituv, S. 2012. A Rejoinder to Nadav Na'aman's "A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom." *Israel Exploration Journal* 62: 223–232.
- Ahituv, S. 2014. Notes on the Kuntillet 'Ajrud Inscriptions. Pp. 29–38 in "See, I will bring a scroll recounting what befell me" (Ps 40:8): *Epigraphy and Daily Life from the Bible to the Talmud Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Hanan Eshel*, ed. E. Eshel and Y. Levin. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Ahituv, S. 2023. Four First Temple Period Papyri. Pp. 317–322 in *New Studies in the Archaeology of the Judean Desert: Collected Papers*, ed. O. Sion, J. Uziel, A. Ganor, and E. Klein. Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authorities.
- Ahituv, S., Eshel, E., and Z. Meshel. 2012. The Inscriptions. Pp. 73–142 in *Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border*, ed. Z. Meshel. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Al-Jallad, A. and Jaworska, K. 2019. *A Dictionary of the Safaitic Inscriptions*. SSSL 98. Leiden: Brill.
- Aufrecht, W. E. 2019. *A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*. 2nd edition. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns.
- Barkay, G., Lundberg, M. J., Vaughn, A. G., and Zuckerman, B. 2004. The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 334: 41–71.
- Berlejung, A. and Schüle, A. 1998. Erwägungen zu den neuen Ostraka aus der Sammlung Moussaieff. *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 11: 68–73.
- Bordreuil, P., Israel, F., and Pardee, D. 1998. King's Command and Widow's Plea: Two New Hebrew Ostraca of the Biblical Period. *Near Eastern Archaeology* 61: 2–13.
- Bridge, E. J. 2010. Polite Language in the Lachish Letters. *Vetus Testamentum* 60: 518–534.
- Bridge, E. J. 2011. Self-Abasement as an Expression of Thanks in the Hebrew Bible. *Biblica* 92: 255–273.
- Cross, F. M. 1996. A Papyrus Recording a Divine Legal Decision and the Root *rhq* in Biblical and Near Eastern Legal Usage. Pp. 311–320 in *Text, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to*

- Menahem Haran, ed. M. V. Fox, V. A. Hurowitz, A. M. Hurbvitz, M. L. Klein, B. J. Schwartz, and N. Shupak. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Cross, F. M. 2003. *Leaves from an Epigraphers Notebook: Collected Papers in Hebrew and West Semitic Palaeography and Epigraphy*. Harvard Semitic Studies 51. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- DCH II. Clines, D. J. A. 1995. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Vol. II, 2–1. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., Roberts, J. J. M., Seow, C. L., and Whitaker, R. E. 2005. *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- DUL. *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*. 2015. Compiled by G. Del Olmo Lete and J. A. Sanmartín; trans. W. G. E. Watson. 3rd revised edition. Leiden: Brill.
- Eph'al, I. and Naveh, J. 1998. Remarks on the Recently Published Moussaieff Ostraca. *Israel Exploration Journal* 48: 269–273.
- Eshel, E. and Eshel, H. 2008. A Late Iron Age Hebrew Letter Containing the Word Nòqedim. Pp. 571–584 in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Post-Biblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, Vol. 2, ed. C. Cohen, V. A. Hurowitz, A. M. Hurvitz, Y. Muffs, B. J. Schwartz, and J. H. Tigay. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Faigenbaum-Golovin, S., Rollston, C. A., Piastetzky, E., Sober, B., and Finkelstein, I. 2015. The Ophel (Jerusalem) Ostrakon in Light of New Multispectral Images. *Semitica* 57: 113–137.
- Faigenbaum-Golovin, S., Finkelstein I., Levy E., Na'aman, N., and Piastetzky E. 2020. Arad Ostrakon 24 Side A. *Semitica* 62: 43–68.
- HAE. *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*. 1995. By J. Renz and W. Röllig. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Hatav, G. 2021. The Nature of the Infinitive Absolute. Pp. 125–143 in *Linguistic Studies on Biblical Hebrew*, ed. R. D. Holmstedt. Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 102. Leiden: Brill.
- Heide, M. and Peters, J. 2021. *Camels in the Biblical World*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Joüon, P. 2008. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. and revised by T. Muraoka. 2nd edition. Subsidia Biblica 27. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- KAI. *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, Band I, 5., erweiterte und überarbeitete Auflage. 2002. Compiled by H. Donner and W. Röllig. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Knauf, E. A. and Niemann, H. M. 2021. *Geschichte Israels und Judas im Altertum*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Knutson, F. B. 1975. Literary Genres in PRU IV. Pp. 153–214 in *Ras Shamra Parallels II. The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. Fisher. Analecta Orientalia 50. Rome: Pontifical Institute.
- Lane, E. W. 1863. *An Arabic English Lexicon*. London: Williams & Norgate.
- Lehmann, R. G. 2003. Brief oder Botschafter? Eine kotextuelle Annäherung an Lachish Ostrakon 2 und 5. Pp. 75–101 in *Bote und Brief: Sprachliche Systeme der Informationsübermittlung im Spannungsfeld von Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit*, ed. A. Wagner. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Lemaire, A. 1999. Veuve sans enfants dans le royaume de Juda. *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 5: 5–14.

- Lemaire, A. 2012. Quatre nouveaux ostraca paléo-hébreux. *Semitica* 54: 33–49.
- Lemaire, A. 2015. Balm/Balsam in a Hebrew Ostrakon from the Kaufman Collection. Pp. 97–105 in *Recording New Epigraphic Evidence: Essays in Honor of Robert Deutsch on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. M. Lubetski and E. Lubetski. Jerusalem: Leshon Limudin.
- Lemaire, A. and Langlois, M. 2021. Judahite Religion in Light of Hebrew Ostraca from the Jeselsohn Collection: A Preliminary Overview. *Eretz Israel* 34: 86*–94*.
- Lemaire, A. and Yardeni, A. 2006. New Hebrew Ostraca from the Shephelah. Pp. 197–224 in *Biblical Hebrew in its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. S. E. Fassberg and A. Hurvitz. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Mendel-Geboverich, A., Shaus, A., Faigenbaum-Golovin, S., Sober, B., Cordonsky, M., Paisetzky, E., and Finkelstein, I. 2017. A Brand New Old Inscription: Arad Ostrakon 16 Rediscovered via Multispectral Imaging. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 378: 113–125.
- Mandell, A. 2012. “I Bless You to YHWH and His Asherah”: Writing and Performativity at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. *Maarav* 19: 131–162.
- Mandell, A. 2022. Lachish “Letter” 2 (BM 125702): A Polite Letter, an Accreditation Pass, or a Text Used to Teach Letter Writing? *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 388: 91–111.
- Meshel, Z. ed. 2012. *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Milik, J. T. 1961. Textes hébreux et araméens. Pp. 67–208 in *Les Grottes de Murabba’at*, ed. P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux. Discoveries in the Judean Desert II. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Na’aman, N. 2011. Textual and Historical Notes on Eliashib’s Archive from Arad. *Tel Aviv* 38: 83–93.
- Na’aman, N. 2012. A New Look at the Epigraphic Finds from Horvat ‘Uza. *Tel Aviv* 39: 212–229.
- Na’aman, N. 2021. New Light on Six Inscriptions from Arad. *Tel Aviv* 48: 213–235.
- Naveh, J. 1979. Graffiti and Dedications. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 235: 28–29.
- Naveh, J. 2001. Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period. *Israel Exploration Journal* 51: 194–207.
- Pardee, D. 2002. Hebrew Letters. Pp. 77–86 in *The Context of Scripture*, Vol. 3: *Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, ed. W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. Leiden: Brill.
- Pardee, D., Sperling, S. D., Whitehead, J. D., and Dion, P.-E. 1982. *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters: A Study Edition*. Chicago, CA: Scholars Press.
- Rogland, M. 2003. *Alleged Non-Past Uses of Qatal in Classical Hebrew*. *Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 44. Assen: Royal Gorcum.
- Rollston, C. A. 2003. Non-Provenanced Epigraphs I: Pillaged Antiquities, Northwest Semitic Forgeries, and Protocols for Laboratory Tests. *Maarav* 10: 135–193.
- Rudolph, W. 1955. *Chronikbücher*. Handbuch zum Alten Testament 21. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Schniedewind, W. H. 2014. Understanding Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: A View from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. *Maarav* 21: 271–293.
- Schniedewind, W. H. 2019. *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible*. Oxford: OUP.

- Schniedewind, W. H. 2022. "And now" w't(h): A Transition Particle in Ancient Hebrew. Pp. 143–150 in *"Like 'Ilu Are You Wise": Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Dennis G. Pardee*, ed. H. H. Hardy, J. Lam, and E. D. Reymond. *Studies in Ancient Civilization* 73. Chicago: The Oriental Institute.
- Schniedewind, W. H. 2023. Adaptation in Scribal Curriculum: Examples from the Letter Writing Genre. Pp. 233–248 in *The Scribe in the Biblical World*, ed. E. Eshel and M. Langlois. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 547. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Schniedewind, W. H. and Smoak, J. 2019. Religion at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. *Religions* 10: 1–18.
- Schwiderski, D. 1997 "Wer ist dein Knecht? Ein Hund!" Zu Aufmerksamkeitsserregern und Überleitungsformeln in hebräischen Briefen. Pp. 127–141 in *Studien zur hebräischen Grammatik*, ed. A. Wagner. *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 156. Freiburg: Universitätsverlag.
- Sokoloff, M. 2009. *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias
- Thomas, B. 2009. The Language of Politeness in Ancient Hebrew Letters. *Hebrew Studies* 50: 17–39.
- Torczyner, H., Harding, L., Lewis, A., and Starkey, J. L. 1938. *The Lachish Letters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Watts, J. D. W. 1962. Infinitive Absolute as Imperative and the Interpretation of Exodus 20:8. *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 33:141–145.
- Zammit, A. 2016. *The Lachish Letters: A Reappraisal of the Ostraca Discovered in 1935 and 1938 at Tell ed-Duweir*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford.
- Zammit, A. 2017. Message Decoding: What Does the Inscription of Lachish 2 Represent? Pp. 41–59 in *"What Mean These Stones?" (Joshua 4:6, 21): Essays on Texts, Philology, and Archaeology in Honour of Anthony J. Frendo*, ed. D. Mizzi, N. C. Vella, and M. R. Zammit. *Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement* 50. Leuven: Peeters.